Regional Rural White Paper (RWP) for the East of England

Issues Paper for EERF Consultation 3rd March 2010

Purpose of the Rural White Paper

The East of England Rural White Paper (RWP) is designed to (EERF tender document amended):

> The purpose of the White Paper will be to refocus priorities for rural communities in the East of England region against a changing backdrop of national, regional and local policy and organisational structures. Through engagement between public, private and voluntary sector partners the document will be presented as an agreed vision and strategy to achieve it over the next five years.

Consultation process

The purpose of this issues paper is to set out some ideas on the issues which should be considered in developing a RWP for the East of England. It is not intended to be comprehensive in its treatment of any of the issues, but should identify the areas where work needs to focus.

Following the consultation on the 3rd March all feedback received at the event or directly will be used to help develop a full draft of the Rural White Paper which will be sent to all consultees on 17th March for a further 2 weeks of written consultation.

The feedback from all sources received during March will be used to develop a final RWP during April, with the intention that it will be launched at a regional EERF conference (provisionally) on 12th May 2010.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on any of the issues covered in the paper below, but in particular would welcome input or feedback on the following areas:

- Within each of the chapters, **have we correctly identified the key issues that we should focus on?** We believe we have to remain very focused on only key issues or we will end up with so many issues overall that we will do no justice to any of them, and will fail to identify a set of core issues on which EERF can focus its case for action to support rural areas;

- **Are there other innovative actions or changes to policy which would make a real difference to rural outcomes?** If so, **what are they, what needs to happen and who could lead them?**

- **Are there particular data sources or reports which we should be using to develop ideas in each of these areas?**

- **Are you aware of innovative case studies which would help to explain how new approaches to delivery can make a real difference to delivering rural outcomes?** These can be from the region, other parts of the UK or international.

The consultation event on the 3rd March will debate these questions, but if either before or after this you wish to submit ideas or suggestions which we should be using please do not hesitate to contact us as follows: Lynn Collison lynn@collisonassociates.co.uk

Proposed RWP structure

Introduction and Executive summary

Main text (divided into 8 core chapters)

- Chapter 1 - Sustainable Rural Communities - planning for balanced rural growth, role of villages, Market Towns and urban centres (including land use)

- Chapter 2 - Delivering A Dynamic Economy - employment, new markets and businesses, education and skills, supportive business environment

- Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure - transport, housing, workspace

- Chapter 4 - Embracing the Digital Age - broadband, mobile phones and digitally enabled communities and businesses

- Chapter 5 - A Living Environment - bio-diversity, landscape, heritage and built environment / distinctiveness, access to the environment, valuing eco-system services, water

- Chapter 6 - Dealing with Climate Change - mitigation, resilience and business continuity(adaptation), energy

- Chapter 7 - Living well - Access to services - role of community buildings, health and wellbeing, community safety

- Chapter 8 - Engaged Communities - empowerment, councils and local structures to deliver chapters 1-7 through engaged people and communities who champion and drive change
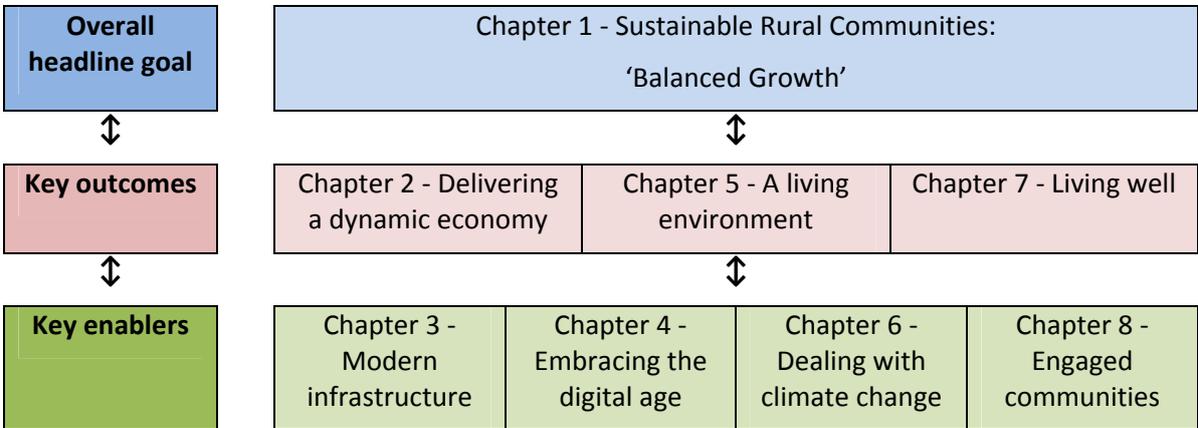
Conclusions and call to action

Appendices

In developing the chapters, we have attempted to group topics in a logical structure, but also in some cases new ways (e.g. putting housing, transport and workspace together as core components of hard infrastructure). We also believe that the chapters fall into three groups:

- Overall goal - to set out what we are trying to achieve and the need for us to plan proactively for balanced growth;

- Key outcomes - around economic, social and environmental areas;

- Key enablers - areas of action which will help deliver the overall goal and key outcomes.

Table 1 - Rural White Paper proposed structure

Overall headline goal	Chapter 1 - Sustainable Rural Communities: 'Balanced Growth'			
↕	↕			
Key outcomes	Chapter 2 - Delivering a dynamic economy	Chapter 5 - A living environment	Chapter 7 - Living well	
↕	↕			
Key enablers	Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure	Chapter 4 - Embracing the digital age	Chapter 6 - Dealing with climate change	Chapter 8 - Engaged communities

Chapter 1 - Sustainable Rural Communities

It can be argued that planning for balanced rural growth is the fundamental cross cutting issue which underpins all other areas of the RWP. The East of England is projected to be the fastest growing region in England to 2030 with the Regional Spatial Strategy[i] foreseeing the population reaching 6 million by 2021[ii]. Whilst much of the growth is proposed in major urban 'growth areas', housing projections and job creation targets foresee more general growth across the region, and in the growth areas the scale of development will have major impacts on their rural hinterlands.

Work by Birkbeck College (2008)[iii] for EEDA looked at the linkages between urban and rural areas and found multiple links in terms of the economy, travel to work, access to services and social reasons with major cities and market towns having significant impacts on their hinterland.

EERF's papers on planning[iv] and growth have called for changes in the planning system to support more balanced rural growth, i.e. economic growth to match housing growth. National data shows the rural population is growing by 70,000 people per year (CRC 2007), with projections by ONS suggesting the rural population will increase by 16% in the next 20 years but only 9% in urban areas.

The Taylor Review (2008) [v] focused heavily on planning, and proposed that 'a fundamental shake up of planning & affordable housing policy is vital to breath new life & prosperity into rural communities'. It also said that 'if we fail to build affordable homes to enable people who work in the countryside to live there we risk turning our villages into gated communities of wealthy commuters & the retired' and called for a 'more flexible approach to work-based extensions to homes'. On market towns it proposed a change 'from endless bland housing estates to create new neighbourhood extensions with shops & community facilities, workplaces & open spaces'.

In a crowded region decisions on land use are central to the debate on balanced growth. Since 2000 the rural counties of Norfolk and Suffolk have seen the most dramatic increase in their urban areas[vi].

Agriculture and Forestry are the two main land users covering 88% of the region, but there has been a 6% drop in agricultural land since 1998[vii]. The area of woodland is increasing but some is being lost to development, habitat restoration, deer browsing and climate change[viii]. The Read Report (2009)[ix] has recommended increasing woodland by 10khectares per annum to aid emissions reduction. Renewable energy is also a land user of increasing importance. These issues form the central argument of the CLA Food and Environmental Security policy[x].

Tourism, leisure and heritage are regional key economic sectors and the Spatial Strategy[xi] has identified specific, often rural, local features or assets as being key drivers of tourism. However, there is a desire to develop new sustainable tourism away from "honey pot areas" to both spread the economic benefits and to lessen the impact of environmental damage on fragile sites.

EERF has previously recognised that positive planning policy which is applied consistently is essential, and that the content of regional and local development plans will have major impacts on how rural areas develop. Balanced growth in this context could be defined as the need to:

a) Balance the economic growth of rural and urban areas so that they are mutually supportive;

b) Match increases in rural population with growth in rural employment to avoid 'rural dormitories'

c) Ensure rural areas provide the modern infrastructure, community facilities, services and housing to support a growing, vibrant and diverse population;

d) Recognise the impact of increasing population in the region on the countryside and biodiversity;

e) Recognise the need to maintain agricultural land to deliver food, fuel & environmental security[xii];

f) Increase the woodland area to meet Read's planting target (five times current planting levels).

It is therefore proposed to make the desire for **Balanced Rural Growth** the headline issue for the RWP with all other chapters feeding into this overarching aim.

Chapter 2 - Delivering a Dynamic Economy

The employment mix of rural areas has changed and is now close to that found in urban areas (e.g. manufacturing 15% in both) with employment across the commercial, public and third sectors. However, home-based working is under 10% in urban areas, 17% in rural areas and 31% in the most rural areas, and this represents the most significant difference between urban and rural Britain.

Recent national reports have proposed that rural areas have the capacity to develop their employment through diversification of the economy (EFRA 2008[xiii], CRC 2008) and by supporting more work live units (Taylor 2008). The Taylor Review (2008) found that knowledge intensive businesses only increased 21% in urban areas between 1998-'05, but 46% in rural areas, dispelling the myth that rural areas lack a focus on high tech enterprise.

The CRC (2008)[xiv] produced a report on releasing the economic potential of rural areas which proposed that it was possible to double the economic output of rural areas. The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (2009)[xv] and New Industry New Jobs (2009)[xvi] have both pointed to a need to develop new markets, many of which are based on producing sustainable products from land.

Despite the recession research continues to show an increased demand for sustainable products (DEFRA 2009)[xvii], with 47% of consumers willing to do more to help the environment.

The agricultural sector has been a major influence on rural areas over many years but is undergoing radical change. The food chain represents 1 in 7 jobs in the regional economy and produces 7% of the region's GVA) and the region has set out a new 2020 Vision for the Food and Farming sector[xviii].

The EERF position paper on skills[xix] showed that rural areas do well for learning attainment until the age of 14-15, but after this attainment (particularly the adult workforce) falls behind urban. There are big differences between more accessible and remote rural, with remote areas doing badly on attainment and access, with the smallest market towns worst of all (State of the Countryside 2007)[xx].

35% of the adult population in rural areas have no qualifications against under 28% in urban areas (EESCP 2007). The figures for rural workforce qualification are also believed to be adversely affected by the loss of highly skilled young people who move to urban areas to study or for jobs. All reports predict a continued increase in the demand for higher level skills, with rural areas lagging even further behind urban areas in this regard e.g. Breckland L4 qualified workforce only 16% (EESCP). New Industries, New Jobs (BIS 2009) predicts that in developed countries demand for unskilled workers will have fallen 16% but increased 19% for skilled workers over the period 2001-30.

It is also imperative to ensure the regulatory and fiscal framework supports rural business, which is even more skewed towards small businesses than urban areas. In its New Approach to the Rural Economy[xxi] FSB argues strongly for rate relief, empty buildings rate relief and more positive support for diversification to enhance social and economic sustainability in rural communities.

These analyses support the region's position which was set out in EERF's papers on rural growth (2008)[xxii] and skills (2007) and the 2020 Vision for agri-food which collectively propose a need to:

a) Promote a high growth scenario for the rural economy to reduce the need for commuting by creating more rural workspace and by supporting home based businesses;

b) Grow knowledge intensive sectors where an attractive rural business environment can be used to attract high skill employees, and where technology reduces the need to be urban based;

c) Production of sustainable materials including the growing market for renewable energy;

d) Revitalise the agri-food sector to promote a sustainable growth in its economic contribution;

e) Ensure education policy and funding methodologies recognise the specific issues inherent in delivering education and learning provision in sparsely populated areas;

f) Increase the focus on adult, continuing and bite size courses and make it easier for employers to support learning programmes (by reducing administration and providing clear incentives).

Chapter 3 - Modern infrastructure

Rural communities are diverse and need a range of different housing provision. Despite the recession, the population of the East of England is still expected to grow by over a million to seven million by 2031. Housing delivery is failing to meet demand, and new homes must be planned so first-time buyers, young families and others can buy or rent at an affordable price (EERA 2008). The Taylor Review (2008) highlighted that people who work in the countryside increasingly cannot afford to live there, while people who can afford to live there increasingly do not work there.

The ageing population also poses one of the greatest housing challenges. By 2026 older people will account for 48% of the increase in households (Lifetime Homes/ Neighbourhoods Strategy 2008)[xxiii]. In rural parts of the region this % will be even higher as a consequence of in-migration at retirement. This strategy talks about "Lifetime Neighbourhoods...where transport, good shops, green spaces, decent toilets and benches are consciously planned for people off all ages and conditions in mind". Without affordable homes for young families to provide the workforce to supply services the government vision will not be fulfilled in the region's rural areas.

There is a need to upgrade private and public housing stock - Affordable housing supply could be increased rapidly through a targeted programme to reduce empty property in rural areas, but VAT rates currently act as a disincentive for refurbishment (CPRE/NHF 2008). Refurbishment is also an efficient way to address fuel poverty and achieve zero carbon homes.

The Taylor Review (2008) [xxiv] called for 'more flexible approach to work-based extensions to homes' and on market towns it proposed the need to change 'create new neighbourhood extensions with shops & community facilities, workplaces & open spaces'.

Across the country there is a range of work which has been conducted on developing new rural workspace. All these reports show a strong local demand for rented workspace, and in 2006 26% of total new rural commercial lets were in the East of England[xxv]. Work in the Haven Gateway demonstrated a wide range of redundant farm buildings amounting to 700ksqft potentially available.

In Staffordshire there is a Rural Workspace programme (partnership with rural forum & CLA, NFU, Councils) which found that over ½ of demand was from creative industries and business services. Key success factors were engaging the right partners early in the programme and funding flexibility.

Rural access to services and employment rely heavily on effective transport (both public and private) and infrastructure provision. Sadiq Khan, Transport Minister (2009) has said: "Good transport links are an essential lifeline for rural communities and it's not just a question of the number of bus services, but about going to the right places at the right times".

However, most rural journeys cannot be made using public transport and government taxation policy that seeks to encourage public transport use at the expense of private transport impacts disproportionately in rural areas. Furthermore the FSB (2009) argues that in rural market towns parking charges should be set so that they encourage tourists and shoppers and not set at (higher) levels to maximise short term revenue generation for the Council.

Key issues on physical infrastructure include:

a) The need to increase the sustainability of housing, including water, waste and energy services;

b) To increase the supply of land for affordable housing by using new finance (public and private)and approaches to develop new sites in all communities;

c) Rural transport solutions, whilst emphasising the need to reduce carbon, will have to include private car use and government policy must not unduly penalise rural car users;

d) The need for a framework to help social enterprise in the transport sector to move forward[xxvi];

e) The need to take positive action on providing rural workspace for SMEs and home-working.

Chapter 4 - Embracing the Digital Age

Digital technology has the potential to bring benefits to rural areas by improving access to services, creating more flexible labour markets, whilst helping address climate change and aiding economic recovery.   An estimated 90% of public services are now available online, with some exclusively online[xxvii]. There are also potentially reduced costs for businesses in complying with legislation, e.g. the Whole Farm Approach reduces form filling by 15% and saves the industry £16.5m per year[xxviii].

 Businesses are increasingly reliant on the internet and PAYE and VAT have to be filed online from April 2010[xxix]. The Federation of Small Business (FSB) has estimated that by 2012, £1 in every £5 will come from online commerce and stated that most small businesses want a minimum speed of 8Mbps[xxx]. With 72% of small businesses operating a website, there is a need to make sure they have access to effective broadband so that they can meet the demands of customers and clients[xxxi].

However, rural broadband speed is not keeping pace with urban provision and the current 2017 80% target for high speed broadband is seen by many as too little too late[xxxii]. An FSB report[xxxiii] concluded that the key reason for the lack of take-up of new internet tools could be the lack of access to high-speed broadband - only 37% of businesses had access to broadband over 4Mbps.

The FSB also found that there were strong links between educational level and owner's age and internet adoption and some companies are relocating to urban areas to remain competitive. Lack of broadband speed hinders home workers[xxxiv] , to whom upload speeds are critical as they enable the exchange of data with remote networks, but most ISP's prioritise download speeds[xxxv].

Advertised download speeds are expected to rise quickly in a few years to 100Mbps – 200Mbps, to allow rapid file downloading, video and improved uploading[xxxvi]. The Government is committed to ensuring that every household will have access to 2Mbps by 2012. At the present time over 42% of rural households don't reach 2Mbps[xxxvii], 160,000households cannot access broadband services and another 1.5 million cannot download at more than ½Mb[xxxviii].

The current proposed "broadband tax" on landlines to fund next generation access broadband by 2017 may not deliver in rural areas because the £1-1.5bn that this levy is likely to raise is thought to be insufficient to upgrade all the copper network to fibre optic in rural areas[xxxix]. The costs of installing fibre optic cable to remote rural areas means that other options to provide broadband in rural "not spots" need to be considered in the short term:

- Satellite broadband could be a viable option in rural areas, e.g. Eutelsat already offers speeds of 3.6Mbps with 10Mbps available later in 2010, and the Irish Government is already using this technology to provide broadband in rural areas[xl];

- Mobile broadband is viable in some areas, however, 3G coverage varies across the country and according to provider, and current maps indicate that coverage is far from guaranteed[xli];

- BT Openreach's Broadband Enabling Technology is capable of turning "Not Spots" into "Yes Spots", is being trialled in 9 UK exchanges including rural areas[xlii] but only delivers upto 2Mbps.

Key issues which a digital rural programme needs to cover include:

a) The need for all rural areas to have access to next generation digital technology well before 2017, and to achieve an immediate move to universal 2Mbps by using all available technologies;

b) Next generation access (super-fast) broadband should be the aspiration of all rural residents and businesses with broadband seen as an essential utility[xliii];

c) Mobile broadband is the only viable option for the 20% (young) which now have no fixed line[xliv];

d) There is a need to stimulate demand in rural "not spots" for commercially viable broadband solutions by pooling the purchasing power of public sector, domestic and business users[xlv];

e) There needs to be a willingness amongst all sectors of the rural population and workforce to adopt new technology matched with appropriate training provision.

Chapter 5 - A Living Environment

This region's landscape has many contrasts but there has been a steady decline in distinctiveness both within and between character areas. This is due to changes to agricultural practices, the impact of development, roads and infrastructure, recreational and tourism activity[xlvi]. 23% of the region's SSSI's were in unfavourable condition (2008) due to coastal squeeze, water pollution and abstraction. Recent changes in farming have been beneficial for the natural environment, but biodiversity in the wider countryside remains in a fragile state and appears to be in poorer condition than SSSIs. Farmland bird numbers are 52% lower than in 1966, and were adversely affected by changes in farming in the 1970s and '80s.[xlvii]

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan proposes ambitious targets to create new wildlife habitats and restore species populations with the East of England having the ability to achieve this. Opportunities for achieving the BAP targets may arise with development proposals and as a result of climate change (e.g. wetland creation, salt marsh creation, heathland restoration). Such schemes can provide accessible and attractive green spaces for local communities and visitors[xlviii]. All of these issues feed into work to develop a valuing ecosystems services approach.

The East of England has a wealth of historic buildings and distinctive landscape features, with rural and coastal areas particularly rich in these features. However, significant numbers of historic buildings and sites are at risk of deterioration and English Heritage[xlix] has identified the need to secure the future of redundant buildings by encouraging adaptive re-use. Coastal management policies must also take account of the historic environment. There is a recognise skills shortage in the maintenance of historic buildings.

Water quality in rivers has improved considerably over the last decade due to tighter regulation and specific guidelines for land managers. However diffuse pollution continues to be an issue due to farming methods. In the region Defra has identified 12 Catchment Sensitive Priority Areas where farmers are eligible for support and grant aid to help mitigate this issue. [l]

The two key issues in the East of England relating to water quantity are the fear of flood and drought. The East of England is the driest region in England, and one of the fastest growing. Water resources are limited and there are already supply-demand issues in the southern parts of the region. Agriculture uses a higher percentage of water than the national average (5% versus 1%) but this can rise on occasional days to over 60% (for irrigation)[li]. In some catchments abstraction is not reliable during dry winters and under predicted scenarios for climate change more frequent drought conditions are expected, leading to increased pressure on resources.[lii]

The region contains many low-lying areas at risk from flooding. The coastline is also at significant risk from coastal flooding, including inland from the Wash. The region's vulnerability (due to the impact of climate change) to flooding is increasing and in parts of the region a policy of managed realignment may be both needed and beneficial to the management of flood risk by enabling development to be safeguarded and new habitats, such as saltmarsh, to be created.

Key issues on the environment include the need to:

a) Increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts of agricultural systems on wildlife and the environment by reducing diffuse pollution;

b) Recreate habitats on former agricultural land, and create buffers for sensitive sites.

c) Increase water storage capacity in both natural and artificial reservoirs for agricultural, domestic and industrial use and to make more use of peak flow to secure water supplies;

d) Encourage water efficiency, water harvesting and collaborative irrigation schemes to improve efficiency;

e) Promote the role of heritage and the historic built environment in supporting economic and community development;

f) Engage in the process to develop the valuing ecosystem services approach.

Chapter 6 - Dealing with Climate Change

Due to its economy and landscape the region is at severe risk from the effects of climate change. The main impacts will be increased risk of coastal and fluvial flooding; more frequent storm events; an increase in demand for water; changes in biodiversity and loss of habitats; an increase in the growing season for crops and trees but reduced availability of water for irrigation[liii].

The key challenge for rural areas is to respond to the twin challenges of:

- Mitigating climate change by adopting lower carbon lifestyles;

- Adapting to climate change impacts by both understanding and responding proactively to the risks and benefits which may result.

To play its part in helping to mitigate these effects the region must reduce greenhouse gases as proposed by Stern[liv], and the RES has set a 2031 target for a 60% reduction in CO_2 emissions. To achieve this new building designs and infrastructure as well as changes to consumer products and transport and planning systems will be required. Agriculture and the natural environment are very exposed to these changes and will need to adopt new land management systems to address the need for new crops and sustainable coastal management[lv]. The Forestry Commission (Read 2009)[lvi] have proposed that woodland can play an important role in climate change response.

In rural areas, some communities are experimenting with how to become carbon neutral[lvii]. In rural areas where dependency on private car usage is high and there are limited local services, changes in behaviour and service delivery methods are needed. Community participation and attitudinal change will also be needed, along with planning for sustainable lifestyles. The region's climate change partnership has developed an understanding of existing activity on adaptation and mitigation and produced a climate change action plan[lviii].

As the region increases in size energy demand will rise. Current distribution network capacity is problematic in several areas and careful planning is needed to ensure development in rural areas is not disadvantaged or halted through poor infrastructure[lix]. More flexibility will be needed to match the demand and supply from the national grid or embedded local generation.

The Housing Green Paper (2007) set targets for all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016. In order to meet these targets efficiency must be improved combined with increased use of local renewable generation[lx]. This will also help combat fuel poverty. In 2006 9.8% of the region's households suffered from fuel poverty, a figure which will increase if no action is taken[lxi], with over 60 single person households and off grid areas like the Fens having some of the highest levels of fuel poverty.

The East of England is the leading English region for renewable electricity, currently producing 8.9% of its electricity from renewables. The Renewables East 2008 Strategy[lxii] has identified a road map to achieving the UK's 2020 objectives in the region. The key forms of renewables are on/off shore wind, biomass, farm waste and landfill gas. As some of these sources are intermittent in nature, they impose technical challenges in power system operation.

The key issues for rural areas in responding to the challenge of climate change are to:

a) Mitigate climate change by adopting lower carbon lifestyles by embracing new technologies, managing existing resources better and (in some circumstances) by localising the economy;

b) Promote easier connections to the energy infrastructure to encourage more small scale local energy generation (heat and electricity);

c) Promote a supportive environment for local renewables through easier licensing and funding systems to make renewables a default choice for rural communities and developers.

d) Plan and adapt to climate change impacts by both understanding and responding proactively to the risks and benefits which may result by developing contingency plans for severe weather conditions and by ensuring the planning system builds adaptation into development proposals;

Chapter 7 - Living well

Many of the region's rural areas are faced with declining or threatened local services. Unless a community has a range of households the demand for services will be hard to sustain (CPRE/NHF 2008)[lxiii]. Evidence suggests that rural areas which don't sustain a range of employment will struggle with service provision as they lack a daytime population to access services close to where they work. Home working and internet based enterprise can help to address this issue (CLG 2009)[lxiv]. The regional plan stresses that new houses must be aligned with new jobs, but whilst this is normally assumed to mean urban employment, broadband can allow this to occur in rural areas.

FSB (2009)[lxv] highlights that there are 4,750 rural post offices in England and has called for a new Post Bank and highlights a failure to modernise services to keep up with those introduced by other providers as a key issue. The government has responded with plans for new financial services[lxvi].

For more affluent rural residents broadband is allowing improved access to retail and other services. However, many rural households lack broadband, don't have the income or skills to utilise online services and are dependent on local provision. In many areas local shops, pubs and other outlets are closing, and broadband is accelerating this as those with access to the internet take business away.

Rural community building usage has trebled since 1988[lxvii], in buildings with a value of over £3bn and which form a crucial but largely ignored aspect of community engagement. The report suggests that these facilities have supported an increasingly wide range of outcomes for the community, but only 3% receive regular funding from their local authority, and many struggle with viability and repairs.

Community safety as measured by crime rate is lower than in urban areas, however the perception of rising crime levels is causing anxiety. Action to re-assure residents and address theft from remote premises, anti-social behaviour or fly tipping can do much to allay the fear of crime in rural areas.

It is widely assumed that rural populations are healthier and mortality is lower in rural areas. However, a number of studies have challenged this and found that differences in socio-economic circumstances largely explain most of the differences (HSQ 2008)[lxviii]. Rural communities across the region are diverse and those in poverty, and thus at risk of poor health, are dispersed amongst the affluent, masking their needs. There are also marginalised groups (e.g. travellers and migrants), whose needs are often not apparent in routine NHS monitoring.

The age balance is also shifting, with the elderly choosing to live in rural areas, whilst the young migrate out. Together with longer, but not always healthier lifespan, these changes increase the demand for services. Rurality also increases the risk of isolation, mental and physical ill health e.g. suicide rates in males are 11% higher in rural areas than urban (after allowing for deprivation (HSQ 2008)), and evidence suggests rural patients present later which can affect outcomes e.g. cancers.

Rural residents are likely to spend more time in the car compared to urban residents. There is increasing evidence of the physical, mental and emotional benefits of time spent in green space (Natural Heritage 2008)[lxix], and the Walking the Way to Health initiative has been shown to have real health and economic benefits (Natural England 2009)[lxx].

The areas on which most rural reports agree action needs to focus are:

a) Promoting remote access to services through improving broadband and mobile phone coverage to deliver 'telehealth' and other web based initiatives[lxxi] or by improving transport services;

b) Promoting community ownership approaches of otherwise uneconomic services and/or making more use of community buildings to provide services whilst also increasing their viability[lxxii];

c) Delivering public services in new ways or via the private sector e.g. in village or farm shops;

d) Providing appropriate care locally in new and flexible ways[lxxiii], whilst balancing local and specialist centralised provision to take account of the diverse nature of the rural population;

e) Finding creative ways to encourage rural residents to make more use of the "green gym" on their doorstep and to engage people in other preventative services[lxxiv].

Chapter 8 - Engaged Communities

Change only happens with engaged people and communities to champion and drive forward action, and genuine empowerment comes from people taking responsibility for making things happen[lxxv].

Since April 2009 all Councils have had a "Duty to Involve". However, a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008)[lxxvi] found that services are delivered by an increasingly diverse range of providers, with corresponding issues for user and community involvement. The research suggests that clearer links are needed between strategic partnerships at ward level and those at the local authority level.

In rural areas the ability to engage effectively is compounded by access issues, and incomers such as migrant workers are particularly at risk of not having their views heard effectively.

E-communication channels are potentially useful to target hard to reach groups, but so far have only been used in limited situations. The Local Government Information Unit (2009) has urged councils to use social networking to boost youth participation[lxxvii], and mobile phones also provide a route to these communities.

Care homes are using Nintendo Wii to keep the elderly fit, this has a built in web browser and Councils could improve website access for this audience via this route. Digital television also offers the potential to engage with people who don't access the internet[lxxviii].

The Rural Community Councils[lxxix] have found that the principles of good engagement may be helped by simpler governance structures, however many rural communities have expressed concerns that unitary structures based on large urban areas risk marginalising them. They also found that in order to increase the rural voice some parish and town councils (P&TCs) have introduced "clustering", to address common issues across multiple communities.

ACRE[lxxx] has identified that in order to reach the hard to engage and hard to reach it is important to use creative approaches through for example the involvement of existing local groups. The extended dialogue increases local people's understanding of the needs of all residents, particularly those disadvantaged by lack of mobility, lack of employment, or marginalised for other reasons.

Communities who have a diverse number of residents will increase their skills, knowledge and confidence to actively participate and volunteer in their community. They feel that their views matter and are listened to.

The importance of volunteering to rural community life is vital in improving community cohesion. Where there is a thriving and well-supported voluntary and community sector, including infrastructure, anchor organisations and social enterprises – communities will be empowered.[lxxxi] It is recognised that volunteers need skills, but can also develop life and work skills through volunteering, and greater alignment between volunteer support groups and skills providers should be promoted.

Key issues are the need to:

a) Develop Council and local democracy structures to improve their interaction with community action;

b) Share consultation across all delivery bodies to make it easier for views to be heard[lxxxii];

c) Support the role of volunteers in delivering rural community capacity and services;

d) Achieve meaningful engagement of all parts of the rural community, including the young.

References

[i] EERA (2008), The East of England Plan, May 2008
http://www.gos.gov.uk/goee/docs/Planning/Regional_Planning/Regional_Spatial_Strategy/EE_Plan1.pdf

[ii] EEDA, 2007 http://www.eeda.org.uk/files/Item_7_RES_Review_Annex_2.pdf

[iii] Birkbeck & Sheffield University (2008): Mapping Socio-Economic Flows Across the Region II
A report by the Rural and Evidence Research Centre, Birkbeck College
http://eastofenglandobservatory.org.uk/WebDocuments/Public/approved/user_9/BBK%20SH%20EEDA2%20(2).pdf

[iv] EERF (2008), Briefing Note on Planning Issues that Impact on the Rural Economy
http://www.eerf.org.uk/Documents/Position-papers/071017%20Business%20in%20rural%20areas%20briefing_EG%20DRAFT.pdf

[v] Taylor, Matthew MP (2008), Living Working Countryside - The Taylor Review
http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/reformplanningsystem/matthewtaylorreview/

[vi] CLG, Urban area polygons, 2001
http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/933242.pdf & CRC State of the Countryside
2008 http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/stateofthecountryside2008/overview

[vii] Defra June Survey of agricultural and land use statistics (2000 and 2008)
https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/junesurvey/june_survey.htm

[viii] FC Woodland for Life, 2003 http://www.woodlandforlife.net/wfl/default.html

[ix] The Read Report: Combating Climate Change – A role for UK forests, 2009
http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/SynthesisUKAssessmentfinal.pdf/$FILE/SynthesisUKAssessmentfinal.pdf

[x] European Landowners Organisation / CLA (2008), 21st Century Land Use Challenge

[xi] Go East: East of England Plan: The Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England, May 2008
http://www.gos.gov.uk/goee/docs/Planning/Regional_Planning/Regional_Spatial_Strategy/EE_Plan1.pdf

[xii] http://www.nfuonline.com/documents/Policy%20Services/Economic%20affairs/Recent%20Developments%20in%20UK%20Agriculture%20(2).pdf

[xiii] Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee (2008), The Potential of England's Rural Economy,
Eleventh Report of Session 2007-08, HC 544-1
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmenvfru/544/544i.pdf

[xiv] Commission for Rural Communities (2008), England's Rural Areas: steps to release their economic potential'
(2008) http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/crc67_englands_rural_areas1.pdf

[xv] DECC (2009), UK Renewable Energy Strategy
http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what_we_do/uk_supply/energy_mix/renewable/res/res.aspx

[xvi] DIUS (2009), New Industries, New Jobs
http://www.dius.gov.uk/~/media/publications/N/new_industry_new_jobs

[xvii] DEFRA (2009), Survey of Public Attitudes & Behaviours towards the Environment

xviii East of England Sustainable Food and Farming Group (2009), 2020 Vision for the East of England Food and Farming sector www.eeda.org.uk/2020vision

xix EERF (2007), Position Paper on Rural Learning and Skills http://www.eerf.org.uk/Documents/Position-papers/position%20paper%20on%20skills%20v3%20Final.pdf

xx Countryside Agency (2007), State of the Countryside 2007

xxi Federation of Small Businesses (2009), A New Approach to the Rural Economy

xxii EERF (2008), Position Paper on Sustainable Rural Growth http://www.eerf.org.uk/Documents/Position-papers/position%20paper%20on%20growth%20v3.pdf

xxiii CLG: Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods (2008): A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society, http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/lifetimehomesneighbourhoods

xxiv Taylor, Matthew MP (2008), Living Working Countryside - The Taylor Review http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/reformplanningsystem/matthewtaylorreview/

xxv Savills (2006), Rural Research bulletin 04-06, Commercial Workspace www.savills.co.uk/research/report.aspx?nodeID=7215

xxvi Community Transport Association (CTA) Conference, (November 2009), CTA Chair Dai Powell, CEO of HCT Group

xxvii www.greenfutures.org.uk (July 2009), Green Fields, digital divides

xxviii IBM (2009), IBM's response to Digital Britain http://www.05.ibm.com/uk/smarterplanet/pdf/IBM_DBIRResponse.pdf?ca=content_body&met=uk_smarterplanet_topics_government

xxix www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat

xxx FSB (2009), quote from John Wright, FSB Chairman

xxxi FSB (2008), lifting the barriers to growth in UK small businesses 2008 - Putting the economy back on track: Transport, Environment and ICT

xxxii Commission for Rural Communities (2009), Mind the Gap: Digital England - a rural perspective, CRC 104

xxxiii FSB (2008), lifting the barriers to growth in UK small businesses 2008 - Putting the economy back on track: Transport, Environment and ICT

xxxiv www.greenfutures.org.uk (July 2009), Green Fields, digital divides

xxxv http://www.broadbandgenie.co.uk

xxxvi http:www.broadbandgenie.co.uk

xxxvii www.telegraph.co.uk (2009), Rural Broadband to cost more than urban connections

xxxviii xxxviii http://www.openreach.co.uk/orpg/products/llu/BET/bet.do

xxxix www.telegraph.co.uk

xl http://www.tooway.com/pdf/170609-uk.pdf

xli http://www.mobilebroadbandinfo.co.uk/mobile-broadband-coverage.php

xlii http://www.openreach.co.uk/orpg/products/llu/BET/bet.doc

xliii www.greenfutures.org.uk (July 2009), Green Fields, digital divides

xliv Commission for Rural Communities (2009), Mind the Gap: Digital England - a rural perspective, CRC 104

xlv www.greenfutures.org.uk (July 2009), Green Fields, digital divides

xlvi EEEF: Regional Environment Strategy for the East of England

xlvii Natural England: Investing in the East of England's natural assets, 2009

xlviii Go East Regional Spatial Plan

xlix English Heritage (2008), English Heritage in the East of England 2006-08 www.english-heritage.or.uk/upload/doc/EHplans_EastofEngland.doc?

l Defra: Catchment Sensitive Farming;
http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf/catchments/priority/index.htm &
http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf/documents/csf-map.pdf

li EERF Position paper on Water (2007) http://www.eerf.org.uk/Documents/Position-papers/071128%20Water%20Resources%20Position%20Paper%20Draft.pdf

lii Go East: East of England Plan: The Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England, May 2008
http://www.gos.gov.uk/goee/docs/Planning/Regional_Planning/Regional_Spatial_Strategy/EE_Plan1.pdf

liii Regional Environment Strategy;
http://www.eera.gov.uk/Documents/About%20EERA/Policy/Environment/RENS.pdf

liv Stern Review: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm

lv Sustainable Futures: Integrated Sustainability Framework for the East of England;
http://www.eera.gov.uk/GetAsset.aspx?id=fAAyADMANwA0AHwAfABGAGEAbABzAGUAfAB8ADAAfAA1

lvi The Read Report: Combating Climate Change – A role for UK forests, 2009
http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/SynthesisUKAssessmentfinal.pdf/$FILE/SynthesisUKAssessmentfinal.pdf

lvii CRC: Energy and Climate Change Work Programme;
http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/Climate%20change.pdf

lviii http://www.eeda.org.uk/files/EAST_OF_ENGLAND_CLIMATE_CHANGE_DOC.pdf

lix EEDA: Power Infrastructure Study, September 2009
http://www.eeda.org.uk/files/EEDA_Power_Infrastructure_Study_2.pdf

lx Go East Regional Spatial Strategy

lxi Defra & BERR: UK Fuel Poverty Strategy: 6th Annual Progress Report, 2008
http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file48036.pdf

lxii Renewables East: Primary Energy: 2020 Renewable Energy Targets for the East of England

lxiii CPRE/National Housing Federation (2008): Save Rural England – Build Affordable Homes

lxiv Department for Communities and Local Government (2009):The Government Response to the Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing
http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1184991.pdf

lxv Federation of Small Businesses (2009), A New Approach to the Rural Economy

lxvi Cambridgeshire ACRE (January 2010): Post Office Bank Plans Outlined www.cambsacre.org.uk/news-detail.php?eid=135

lxvii Action with Communities in Rural England (2009), News Release 12th November

lxviii Health Statistics Quarterly 39, ONS (2008), A Gartner, D Farewell, F Dunstan, E Gordon, Differences in mortality between rural and urban areas in England and Wales, 2002-04, Health Statistics Quarterly 39, p6-13, ONS

lxix Natural Heritage (2008): A pathway to Health Institute of Rural Health CCW Policy Research Report No. 07/20

lxx Natural England Technical Information (2009), Note TIN055 – An estimate of the economic and health value and cost effectiveness of the expanded WHI scheme

lxxi Commission for Rural Communities (2009), Mind the Gap: Digital England a Rural Perspective

lxxii The Plunkett Foundation (November 2009): Plunkett Weekly News 20 November 2009
www.plunkett.co.uk/newsandmedia/news-item.cfm/newsid/287

lxxiii Institute of Rural Health (2009), IRH Manifesto http://www.rural-health.ac.uk/pdfs/Manifesto2009.pdf

lxxiv Commission for Rural Communities (2008) Public Health Issues: preventative health services in rural areas, CRC68

lxxv ACRE: Community Led Planning: Turning Engagement into Empowerment;
http://www.acre.org.uk/DOCUMENTS/ruralevidencepapers/ACRE%20Promo%20Turning%20Engagement%20into%20Empowerment.pdf

lxxvi Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008), Community engagement and community cohesion
http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-engagement-and-community-cohesion

lxxvii Local Government Information Unit (2009), Youth Participation: Growing Up?

lxxviii Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (2009), Reaching the Hard to Reach
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageID=11061741

lxxix RCC: Good beginnings: securing effective engagement for town and parish councils. Updated Executive Summary August 2009 ;
http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/CRC90b%20Good%20Beginnings%20Tagged.pdf

lxxxi http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9569609communities

lxxxii Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008), Public officials and community involvement in local services,
http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/public-officials-and-community-involvement-local-services